Lt.-Col. C. H. Weston,
Three Years with the New Zealanders.

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CHAPTER IX

ALDERSHOT

THERE is a School for almost everything in the Army, from shoeing and cooking to the staff work of a Division, although, until October, 1916, there was none for Field Officers. The Army Council then established the Senior Officers' Infantry Course at Aldershot. The New Zealand Division was not represented at the first Course, but for the second, commencing at the beginning of January, 1917, Major S. S. Allen (2nd Brigade), Major J. R. Cowles (3rd N.Z.R.B.) and myself (1st Brigade) were selected.

The views of different Divisional and Brigade Commanders on the value of Schools vary, but I fancy the objects of the Army Council comprised not only instruction but rest for officers. After a few days' leave in London, we met in Farnborough, and found that Allen was posted to Malplaquet Mess, and Cowles and I to Lille Mess. There were over 200 officers at the Course, who were quartered in three messes, Malplaquet, Oudenarde and Lille. The two former had, been Infantry and the latter Artillery quarters before the war. The three messes were each further divided into Syndicates, each of about fifteen officers under its own Instructor, and for ten weeks our interest centred in our mess and our syndicate.

We were invited to bring our wives to Aldershot, but instead of the married officers' quarters in the three messes being available, rooms had to be discovered in Farnborough. My wife and I lived at the Queen's Hotel, and were very comfortable. It was hard to analyse one's sensations on learning of this Course. The war in France has its extraordinary characteristics just as other campaigns have had, and a three months' spell from its discomforts must surely be deemed one of them. Ten weeks at a good School in England *en famille* was almost unbelievable.

The main object of the School was to train Battalion Commanders, of whom so many hundreds are required every year, such is the enormous wastage of personnel in War, but it had Imperial results as well. In my Syndicate were eight Englishmen, one Scotchman, two Canadians, three Australians and one New Zealander, and in others were Irishmen, Welshmen, Newfoundlanders and South Africans; in fact, representatives of nearly every Regiment in France. Strangely enough, one lives rather an isolated life there---beyond the Company officers and men, one meets very few people, and it is only at Schools and on leave that one comes in contact with men from the other parts of the front. From relieving other units, of course, an insight is gained into their organization and methods. But in ten weeks of working together it is impossible not to get to know each other very well. Amongst the Englishmen were a retired Naval Commander, then in the Royal Naval Division, two Regular Soldiers, a Member of the London Stock Exchange, a Merchant, a Bank Clerk and a Civil Engineer; of three Australians, two were Regular Soldiers and one a Surveyor; the two Canadians were a Solicitor and a Farmer, and the Scotchman a Solicitor.

In the mornings we worked from nine until one o'clock, and in the afternoon; at five o'clock there was a lecture. Very often it was not until 2 p.m. that we arrived home for lunch, and generally one or two afternoons a week were taken up with extra drills or lectures. The Course comprised a great variety of subjects, and at its conclusion, when we were invited to suggest any improvement, few were offered. The Commandant was a Brigadier-General, and his original personality impressed itself upon the school. He was full of energy, and, whether his own methods were right or wrong, he never allowed us to forget that our commands were made of flesh and blood, and had to be treated as such. Men are like horses and require the same sort of handling. One of his exercises, that ran through a long series, was to imagine ourselves posted to the command of a Battalion that had been allowed to deteriorate by our predecessor, Captain Brown, and to say how we should set to work to bring it up to a high standard again. To add to the intricacies of the problem, Captain Brown still remained with the Battalion after we took over, and what were we to do with him? I think most of us took him on one side the first evening after dinner, and told him we would have none of his d----d nonsense : not the most tactful way of approaching him, now that one thinks of it. The Commandant was happy in his

choice of Lecturers, who seemed to come from everywhere at his bidding, and give us the latest information on all kinds of subjects. I was very impressed with the standard of lecturing among the regular soldiers. I doubt whether any other profession, even the Bar, would have surpassed it. As a rule they were methodical in arrangement, correct in expression and, above all, audible, in a clear, distinct voice. The Battle of Jutland, by a Naval Captain who had taken part in it, was one of the most popular, and the presence of Prince Albert on the stage to handle his charts added much to its interest. Others were given upon the subjects of Aerial Photography, the Organization of the Royal Flying Corps, Tanks, Espionage, the Battalion Transport, the Campaign in the Cameroons, and many others. Hilaire Belloc gave us one one afternoon upon the question of Man Power.

The General had hoped to arrange a visit to the Grand Fleet, but it was not possible, and we contented ourselves with a weekend at Portsmouth. The messes at the Dockyards at Hayling Island and on H.M.S. *Vernon* are treasure-houses of the Navy's traditions, and the paintings, portraits and plate are historically most interesting. To a stranger it seems as if the Past belongs to the Navy as a whole, while in the Army the Regimental Spirit takes no reek of any doings other than those of its own Regiment. At Aldershot, with the Regular Regiments away, there is little left but the bare walls of the barracks and the stones of the parade ground. The traditions departed with the Regiments. But in the Naval Barracks the visitor comes into the presence of the spirit of the past that gives our First Line Defence its driving force. Thoroughness is the key note of the Navy, perhaps of the Englishman.

Of the different breeds of the Britisher, the most fascinating study is the Englishman; he is the enigma, the inscrutable problem. We younger branches of the race, perhaps, have more in common with the Celts, as we seem to understand the Scotchman and Irishman and Welshman better, and the Head of the Family leaves one with the feeling of not having solved a problem. The Englishman is the Head of the House. He accepts the position and betrays no doubt that he should. Not only is he our Head, but he is the Leader of the World. He has an historical defence of that attitude also, and makes no actual parade of it: he simply behaves as such. He does not question his own right.

To us he is an old man, we being youngsters, and it is difficult always for Youth to understand Age. The Englishman has the imperturbability of old age, and its philosophy, that places more wisdom in a jest than a tear, and that holds as dross what is attained by questionable means. The old man understands that the game of life is not *what* you gain, but *how*. Many years of life and of luxury have made comfort a necessity to him, and, to his methodical, orderly mind, no happiness is possible unless his own circle moves with smooth precision. But does his age prevent him from grasping the fact that in this time of fierce competition more is required than *methodical thoroughness* ? Does his philosophy make him content to watch the keen energy of his rivals with the smile of one who has left his enthusiasm behind many years ago ? And, puzzled, one watches and wonders. Is he too wealthy ? Has he ruled too long ?

I remember it being said of a well-known professional man that he was afraid his work might deteriorate the more successful he became, and it is a man's work by which he is judged in the end. The Englishman is the Head of our House, and, at the moment, if he fails the rest of us fail with him, and so it is a pertinent question for us all to ask, and to seek for an answer, does the Englishman's work stand the test that the strenuous present imposes? Militarily, Politically, Economically, is he a success ? Unfortunately, in the field of battle a few victories have been overshadowed by a long list of failures and defeats. Politically, he has allowed himself to be content, even proud of a System of Government that has left him almost defenceless against an enemy preparing for years to attack him, and that has made it impossible to pass necessary measures for the welfare of its people. Economically, he has allowed his agriculture to dwindle, his key industries to disappear, and his commercial ascendancy to fade. Why is it? Perhaps in old age our weaknesses are accentuated. A fear of Convention seems to be the Englishman's weakness. It is Convention that holds him to Political Institutions that have lost their usefulness. It is Convention that makes him slow to move and so late in action, and it is Convention that makes him a slave to all that is good form. In a vicious circle it makes him a snob and still further hinds him to the wheel. Good form is set by the leisured classes, and their lead is followed in the Public Schools, schools that have grown in number and size so much with the increased wealth of England during the last fifty years. They have no inducement, such as the business man has, to put the last ounce of energy into their work, and enthusiasm over their job is not quite good form, although over everything else it is allowable. The impression one takes back with one is that the educated Englishman, speaking generally, has no great enthusiasm in his job. Of course one should not generalize, and there are many exceptions, but it is the standard of the majority that counts. And, unhappily, lack of enthusiasm leads

to effeminacy and to a fatal lethargy. However, he is a pleasant type to meet, rather shy, but a gentleman, and possessing a great fund of humour. If I may say so, the Englishman that has roamed about the world, or has spent part of his life in the East or in the Colonies, is the more charming, for he shows no trace of an insularity that obtrudes itself in some of those that have never travelled.

At Aldershot, and, I am led to believe, at the other British Army Schools, no serious attempt was made to keep up to date with, or to forestall by military research, the changes in tactics as the war progressed. With the advance in weapons and munitions of all kinds, tactics have altered, but the Schools have lived in a dreamland of returning to a war of movement as it was taught in pre-War days. The result, certainly, was to exercise our military wits, such as we possessed, and to give us a certain facility of grappling with war problems, but it avoided the concrete conditions of the moment. In fact, the opportunity was missed of modernizing the study of tactics in the Schools.

In the field gallant efforts were made by General. Headquarters and Army Headquarters to collect and circulate the lessons learnt from the fighting that took place, but this was hardly enough. As it was, the Regimental Officer, with his Stokes Mortars, and Riflemen, Lewis Guns, Rifle Grenadiers did what Providence dictated to him on the eve of battle, and troops were still sometimes launched against uncut wire and machine-guns without sufficient protection from artillery. The cry was that principles had not changed, only their application, but that was not the solution of the Problem.

However, I had not intended to embark upon a criticism of the Aldershot School. I felt then, as I do now, much indebted to the Course, which came at the right moment in my transitory military career, and what I have written applies, I believe, to all other British Army Schools. And I feel sure that when those very delightful ten weeks drew to a close at the end of March, the majority of the Officers at the School were more fitted to take up the struggle again and to eventually command Battalions in the Field. And not the least enjoyable part of the Course was the two weeks' leave at the end.

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CHAPTER X

MESSINES

THE 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade came into existence on the 15th March, 1917, and comprised the newly-formed 3rd Battalions of the Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Regiments. Lieutenant-Colonel Hart was given the brigade command, Major W. H. Fletcher taking the 3rd Battalion of the Wellington Regiment, while Lieutenant-Colonel Hart's place in the 1st Battalion was filled by Major Cook. Majors Short and Holderness and myself were promoted Seconds in Command of the 3rd, 1st and 2nd Battalions respectively. The new Brigade was mobilized at Codford, and in the short space of two months embarked for France. Varnham, was given accelerated promotion and the command of the Hawke's Bay Company of the 3rd Battalion. Mixed feelings accompany promotion, and I was very sorry to leave my old company. We had been a long time together, and ties had formed which were hard to break.

I left London on the 3rd April, and on arrival at Steenwerck reported to the D.A.A. and Q.M.G. and then to Brigadier-General Brown, spending the night at the Quartermaster's Stores of the 1st Battalion. The 2nd Battalion was at that time in Reserve in Ploegsteert Wood, and on the morning of the 5th I rode up through the wood, past Red Lodge, and Hyde Park Corner, and leaving Billy at the bottom of the Strand walked up its duck-walked path to Creslow House. The sorrow of parting with the 1st Battalion was enhanced by losing the pony, but Lieutenant-Colonel Cook did not feel justified in letting him go. The Corporal of the 2nd Battalion Transport, however, was riding a chestnut mare that Captain Radcliffe of the A.S.C. had brought from New Zealand, and kindly offered her to me. I was very glad to have her, and we also became good friends.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham was at the Officers' Rest-house at La Motte, and I took over the command from Captain Jardine, who then left for the Aldershot course. That afternoon we relieved 2nd Canterbury, the Reserve Battalion in the adjoining Douve sector, a Battalion of the 11th Australian Brigade, taking our place, and next day occupied the left half of the front line in the sector, the whole of which had been held until then by the 1st Battalion, Canterbury Regiment. The 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment, was on our right, and a Battalion of the 25th Division on our left. Our Battalion Headquarters were in McBride's Mansions, a

comfortable row. of dug-outs, and Auckland's were in La Plus Douve Farm. Our residence possessed the advantage of not being easily observed, and we were never shelled while occupying it.

The sector faced, or rather was overlooked by, the remnants of the Village of Messines, still clinging to the Ridge to which it gave its name, and it was not long before we learned that in the coming offensive the task allotted to the N.Z. Division was to capture that village. It was curious, returning to France at the beginning of 1917 : the offensive was in the air. No longer were the same old trenches to be our everlasting home, they were now *pieds-à-terre,* and next winter we should camp in fresh ground, as we hoped, far ahead of the present battle zone. For the moment there was work, more than enough, in making ready for the blows we were to deal the Hun.

Our right boundary was to he the River Douve, and our left beyond the Wulverghem-Messines Road, both of which crossed No Man's Land at right angles to the two opposing lines of Trenches. Across the Wulverghem-Messines Road on our left, the trenches swung back almost at right angles, followed the Road for a little way, and then turned away sharply towards Wytschaete. On our left front the little River Steenbecque, there, in the middle of No Man's Land, ran through the Road towards our right and bent back until it entered our line, ultimately emptying itself into the Douve. From the point where the Steenbecque struck it, to the Wulverghem-Messines Road, our front line was not parallel to the Boche Trenches, and it was therefore decided to dig a new trench in No Man's Land which would give us a jumping-off place on the correct alignment. With a large body of assaulting troops it is of great importance that they do not have to change direction during an attack, and that they all have approximately the same distance to travel. The contemplated trench would run from where the Steenbecque entered our front line to a point on the Wulverghem-Messines Road, about 200 yards from our present line, and would give an additional advantage in enabling us to overlook the bed of the Steenbecque River from its parapet. As it was, the ground sloped steeply down to the stream which divided us from the enemy, and then still more steeply up to Messines, thus obscuring the River Banks from our view.

It was no use disguising the fact that it was a ticklish business. The Engineers had to peg the site of the new Trench at night, and, immediately after dark on the evening appointed, to tape it out. The working party of about 400 men would then be silently marshalled on to the tapes and work commenced. The party would, of course, be protected by outposts, who would not be withdrawn until the work was completed; of necessity the job had to be carried through in one night. The danger lay in discovery by the enemy while the work was in progress. No doubt his guns were laid on No Man's Land at night, and on a single signal from his sentries they would play terrible havoc with our men. The fact that the new trench in its curve beyond the Wulverghem-Messines Road ran perilously close to the German Line made discovery rather probable. An alternative plan was to sap out T-heads from our front line and then connect them up, but it would have been a lengthy business and in the end probably more expensive in casualties.

In the meantime our Patrols set to work to make No Man's Land our own, and to oust the enemy from a listening post he occupied on the road on our side of the Steenbecque. The Post had been described as a heavily wired strong point on maps in the possession of the Division, but on the evening of the 10th a Patrol from Hawke's Bay Company, under Second Lieutenants Bollinger and Booklass, took possession before the Hun arrived. When he came he did not stay long upon his going, but fled helter-skelter. From the careful reconnaissance they made, these two Subalterns were able to supply the Division with correct information, and thereafter we occupied the post at night.

On 11th April, Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham returned, and that evening Lieutenant Keiller, an Engineer Officer, with Lieutenant Molloy, 1st Otago, and Second Lieutenant A. C. Wilson, 2nd Canterbury, pegged out the new trench. Unfortunately, just as the work was completed, Lieutenant Keiller was accidentally wounded by a bomb. On the following evening Molloy checked the pegging, and on the night of the 13th the work was done. The covering party, under R. F. C. Scott, who was now a Captain in command of Hawke's Bay Company, was found by that Company and Wellington West Coast Company, the two detachments being officered by Second Lieutenants Booklass and McKenzie. Captain Scott reported them in their position at 9 p.m., and by 10.30 p.m. the 400 men from 1st Battalion, Otago Regiment, under Major Hargest, M.C., had commenced work. I doubt if anyone can excel New Zealanders at digging, and, with the work completed at 2.30 a.m., the party was clear of the Battalion area on its way back to Billets at 3 a.m. It was only then that the covering party was withdrawn. It was an anxious night, but happily the enemy remained oblivious of what was happening. Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham's arrangement of the covering party was excellent, and

great credit was due to Major Hargest and his men. It is no easy matter to lead 400 men in the dark out of a narrow trench on to a task in No Man's Land : to do it without noise and confusion was the result of excellent organization and discipline. The Batteries supporting the sector stood by their guns while the work was in progress, and their Commander took up his position in our Front Line to control them from there. The Hun's attitude to the new trench was mainly one of indifference, although he registered some of his guns on it next day, and shelled it lightly on the following night.

The entrance to the Douve Sector was by way of Plum Duff Sap, a narrow trench by the side of a road that ran down to La Plus Douve Farm, and hard by the gate leading into the courtyard of the Farm House, was Ration Dump. On the 14th there happened to be in the Dump about fifty Plum Pudding Bombs, each weighing sixty pounds, and a shell from a German Battery striking them, caused a terrific explosion, killing five and wounding eleven men. A few days later the German communiqué alleged that we had flown the Red Cross Flag over the Dump, and upon their suspicions being aroused by the number of men about, they had shelled it, with the result we have seen. Of course, no Red Cross Flag had been hoisted there, but there was a Dressing Station some 300 yards away, which probably their observers had seen. However, after that, Ration Dump was an unhealthy spot, for it was shelled consistently and accurately. It was nevertheless a busy place, as the first-line transport unloaded the Rations there at night, and all reliefs were made by Plum Duff Sap. On the 24th April, during a relief, the outgoing Battalions 1st Battalion Wellington, and 2nd Battalion Auckland, were shelled in the Sap and suffered some casualties. This was in a sense unlucky, because shelling, although consistent, must necessarily be intermittent, and while the guns are active it is generally possible in trench warfare to avoid the danger zone; at the same time that cannot always be done and it is a case of "Carry On" in spite of casualties.

On the 15th April the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion, and established itself on Hill 63, with Headquarters at Strafford Lodge, until April 24th. The Lodge was a Shack, probably built by the Canadians, with trunks of saplings cut from the wood on the hillside. Tactically we were the supporting Battalion of the Brigade, the Reserve Battalion resting at Kortepyp Camp, some two miles away. Up till now the Troops in the enemy trenches were a Saxon Division, but our Intelligence learned from a German deserter that the 40th Division had relieved them. The Saxons have the reputation of being very passive opponents, their motto being "Live and Let Live." It was surprising what little interference we met with in the work. Part of our sector lay spread out at the foot of Messines, and the new work was plainly visible to the German Observers in the Village. Yet the enemy made no effort to check it by his Artillery. What a wonderful view there was from the place was not fully appreciated until we took it in June, and could look back over our own country.

An offensive, organized as was General Plumer's, against the Messines and Wytschaete Ridge, entailed a great deal of preparatory work. Assembly and communication trenches had to be dug to protect the troops for the few hours prior to the assault, and Battalion and Brigade Headquarters constructed. The latter were underground affairs; some thirty feet down, with several entrance shafts, and numerous box rooms opening off the tunnels. In later fights assembly trenches were dispensed with, and the men took their chance while they waited. Communications, also, were necessary. The signals in a modern battle form the most difficult problem. The surest method is by cable, buried in a narrow trench, from seven to nine feet deep, but the limit to this is our front line. Other means are telephone wire, simply run over the surface of the ground, wireless, flags, lamps, pigeons and runners. Different engagements, owing to the various circumstances, have proved the use of the several methods, but preparations are generally made for all of them, and have called into being a highly-trained branch of the Service---the Signallers. A Battalion Commander is much indebted to the initiative and resolution of the Signalling Officer and his Staff. If communication forward to his Companies and back to Brigade is to be established, and maintained, it has to be done without delay, and in spite of danger. Most of the Signallers' work is done under shell-fire, and without cover. The runners are in action part and parcel of the Signal Service, and too much credit can never be given to them. The employment seems to attract the younger boys of the Battalion, and their youth is accentuated by the "shorts" which they are allowed to wear.

They sport as a distinguishing mark a yellow band round the arm, and to it is attached their Battalion patch. It is because these boys have to do their hazardous work alone that they are entitled to so much respect . When possible, two are sent together on specially dangerous missions, but the numbers available do not always allow of this. And so the Head Runner would wake up the lad whose turn it was to do a run and, handing him the message, say laconically, "Ruahine." Private B. would hitch up his shorts, sling his rifle over his shoulder, and slip out of the dug-out door into the black night and drizzling rain. From the moment he was outside he

was in the hands of Fate, and, by himself, he had to find his way to Company Headquarters, perhaps a mile away, deliver his message, and hasten back. A companion at such a time is a tremendous help, but the lonely runner has only his stout young heart to spur him on the way.

Providing the covering party on the night of the 13th did not close the 2nd Battalion's connection with the new trench by the Steenbecque, for on three nights we sent up working parties from Hill 63. Posts from the 1st Battalion protected our men on these occasions. On the night of the 17th, Captain H. E. McKinnon, M.C., Commanding Wellington West Coast Company, with detachments from his own Company (Lieutenant Healy) and from Taranaki (Lieutenant Nicol), dug a drain from the trench down into the Steenbecque, and a continuation of the trench itself. Captain McKinnon had only one casualty. On the 18th the Battalion found 4 officers and 295 other ranks, under myself, to make four communication saps from our old front line to the new one, and the work was done without a mishap. The following night Captain Scott with four parties from Wellington West Coast (Second Lieutenant McKenzie), Hawke's Bay (Second Lieutenant Booklass), Taranaki (Second Lieutenant Natusch) and Ruahine (Lieutenant Taylor), totalling 300 other ranks, carried the trench out further towards the Hun Lines north of the Wulverghem-Messines Road. That was the dangerpoint, and evidently the enemy saw either the covering party or some of our men, for he opened on them with rifle grenades, and rifle and machine-gun fire, killing two and wounding nine. It was bad enough, but fortunately he did not call up his artillery, and things quietened down. This digging was excellent training for a Platoon or Company. It was done by Companies. The Officers had control of their own men, and made their own arrangements. The consequence was. Officers, Non-commissioned officers and men who would have to fight together were working together. It may seem strange, but that system had not always been followed. Previously, a Battalion would be asked for several working parties, and, the margin of men available being small, some of them had to be found from two or more companies, and placed, perhaps, under Officers who were strangers to them. Moreover, on arriving at the job the men would be handed over to the Engineers, who would take complete charge.

Under the new system they would remain with their own officers, who were solely responsible for the work, but had one or two Sappers attached to them as expert advisers. While the Infantry were digging, the Artillery and the Trench Mortar men (Plum Puddings and Stokes) were busying themselves in destroying the enemy trenches, strong points, machine-gun posts, and wire. There was to be a greater concentration of guns for this show than ever before; the Somme and Arras would not stand comparison, and already the 60-pounders and heavies were pounding away at the German defences. "The Flying Pig," as the largest trench mortar is called, had not been installed, but its lesser brethren were doing great work. And, in spite of it all, the retaliation from across the way was weak. The Miners, too, were steadily working, though of their plans we knew little. We gave them men to dump their spoil, and rubbed shoulders with them in the narrow communication trenches, but there it ended.

And this scene of activity we thought we were leaving on the 29th April. We had relieved the 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment, on the 24th, and were in turn relieved by the 2nd Battalion, 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade, on the 26th, and marched back to Kortepyp Camp. Two days were cheerfully spent in making ready for the anticipated trek to the training ground near St. Omer, and a start was to be made on the 29th. The Battalion had had no real spell from trench life since Christmas---four long months---and how it would enjoy three weeks of Spring away from the sound of guns, where mud was unknown! But as if to remind us that in the army our souls are not our own, late at night on the 28th came a note from Brigade Headquarters cancelling the move, and next day at noon we received orders to relieve the 13th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, in the Wulverghem Sector, that adjoined the Douve Sector on its left.

In the afternoon the Company Commanders inspected the trenches, and the relief took place at night. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the whole Battalion was in by 4.30 a.m. Headquarters resided in St. Quentin Cabaret. We remained there until the 4th May, working in the same way as in the Douve Sector, except that we were carrying out plans made by the 25th Division, who were out training. The Sector comprised their frontage of attack and the adjoining one to the north, that of the 36th (Ulster) Division. The weather had taken up, and May bid fair to shame wintry April. On the 4th we changed places with the 1st Auckland Battalion, moving back to Aldershot Camp, near Neuve Eglise.

There was still no respite from digging, but most of it could be done in daylight, as the sector was not under enemy observation. At this time the German for the first time tried his hand at bombarding back areas with long-range guns. We could not blame him, as our heavies had given him the idea, and we had the consolation

of feeling that he had suffered badly from our initiative. It was unpleasant being disturbed at night, but our Battalion escaped casualties; unhappily, others did not. Our Artillery resented this new departure of the Hun, and on the night of the 6th the 6-inch and 60-pounders fired 1,500 shells into Comines and Warneton. The following night for five minutes at 8.45 p.m. and 11 p.m. every heavy gun in the 2nd Army opened up drumfire on the enemy's back areas. They were certainly a series of bad five minutes for him.

On the 10th May the Battalion marched *via* Bailleul and Strazeele to Petit Sec Bois, close by Vieux Berquin. General Godley inspected the Brigade as it passed by in Column of Route. Lieutenant-Colonel Young lent us the Band of the 1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment, as we possessed no band of our own, and its presence was a source of keen enjoyment. Its music lifted the tired trudgers to fresh effort even at the end of a long day's march, and to be near the band was the coveted position in the Column.

We remained in Petit Sec Bois until the 19th, and, with fine weather, some useful training was carried out. While we were there the Brigade held a horse show at Strazeele. The First Line Transport of Brigade Headquarters and of the Battalions is a most important part of their machinery. Its cookers, water-carts and limbered wagons, to say nothing of the Officers' mess cart and the medical cart, are invaluable on active service. There is an immense amount of carting alone to be done in providing for a thousand men, and the limbered wagon for that purpose represents an evolution in army vehicles of decades, and with one improvement and another has developed into its present construction. The Army Service Corps also has four big wagons ear-marked for each Battalion, two of which carry the next day's supplies on the march, and two carry part of its general belongings. In practice, however, the carrying power of the First Line Transport was found to be insufficient when we were on the Trek. The truth of it was, in stationary warfare civilization ventured to lift her head and plucked up courage to again encumber us with what she called necessities. The Pre-War Regulations only thought of a war of movement that would cut down baggage of all kinds to a bare minimum. But the farrier's anvil, the chaff-cutter and the tailor's sewing machine were found economical when it came to settling down in areas for two or three months at a time, and the practice arose of the Division placing two motor lorries at the disposal of each Battalion when on the move, and, as these lorries were generally able to manage two trips a day, all our belongings moved with us. It becomes clear why the wise Commander keeps a keen eye on the condition of his Transport, its vehicles, and its horses and mules, and the competition at the various shows helps to raise the standard generally. At Strazeele the 2nd Battalion provided its share of competitors in all the events, and more than its share in the two Officers' chargers classes. The horses belonging to the Colonel .and to three of the Company Commanders and myself could jump, and we all competed. The Colonel's black mare, Queenie, came third in her class (chargers ridden by officers of field rank), and Captain McKinnon's bay mare, Lucienne, came second in the other class. Driver Wilson, with his two chestnuts, won the limbered wagon event. These beautiful animals, with many others of the 2nd Battalion Transport, were killed in August by bombs from an enemy aeroplane near Steenwerck.

On the 17th the Transport moved ahead by road, and on the 19th the Battalion followed by road and by train, to a little village near St. Omer. There we stayed until the 31st May, and in the twelve days had some very valuable training. Extensive manœuvre grounds were requisitioned by the British Government from the peasants, and sites were chosen and trenches dug to imitate as closely as possible the Messines defences. Our airmen photograph the German trench systems from time to time, so that our knowledge of the lie of the land is accurate. The various trenches are given names beginning with vowels according to the sector they are in; Messines embraced two groups of O's and U's, and hence our objectives included Oyster and Oculist, as well as Uhlan and Ungodly Trenches. Maps are then prepared showing these trench systems and the objectives, and distributed amongst the attacking troops. The Brigade was thus able to practise its own portion of the attack under somewhat realistic conditions. Generals Godley and Russell came down to see it and criticize the work, and both addressed all the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Brigade. In addition to tactics, time was found for musketry, bombing, bayonet fighting, rifle grenade firing and platoon work, and by the 31st, when we turned our faces eastward again, the Battalion was fit for anything.

During our stay the Officers of the 1st Battalion, who were billeted in adjoining villages, entertained us at dinner, and we made a merry party. Our village boasted a dining hall, and the two Battalions between them produced a good share of crockery, and spoons and forks. We sent our hosts home in the Transport limbers, vehicles not designed for passenger traffic, and one of them, taking a corner rather sharply, turned over and shot its occupants on to the road. Several very dilapidated-looking officers were noticed when the 1st Battalion marched past the Brigadier two or three days later.

On the 31st May we marched fifteen miles to Zutpeene, *via* Arques, and the next day another fifteen miles to our former billets. We dropped the Officers and men that were under orders to remain out of the action, on the second day's trek, and they marched away to the Corps Reinforcement Camps near Morbecque. That evening a car came to Battalion Headquarters, and Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham received orders to hand the Command over to me, and himself go to the Reinforcement Camp. He was very disappointed, but it was the policy to leave out one of the four Battalion Commanders, and it was his turn. A march of fourteen miles on the day following (2nd June) brought us to the concentration Camp at De Seule, and after a night's rest and a bath, the Battalion relieved the 2nd Battalion Otago Regiment on Hill 63, with Headquarters again at Strafford Lodge.

The preparatory Bombardment of the enemy positions had commenced, and night and day the guns of all calibres never ceased their infernal din. Throughout Ploegsteert Wood, behind the Hill and on each side of the road to De Seule, the guns were almost wheel to wheel. It was a wild night. As part of his retaliation, the enemy aimed a great many lethal and lachrymatory gas shells at some batteries on our right, near Ploegsteert Village, and with a light breeze blowing from that direction, the Battalion were obliged to sit up all night in respirators. The gas shells exploded with no more than a soft thud, but the high explosive came over with a hiss and a roar and a bang that echoed and re-echoed through the Wood. The guns were so many and the expenditure of ammunition so lavish, that dumps of shells had to be formed at points very close together, and as the enemy shells could not help setting fire to quite a number, the glare and heavy explosions from the burning dumps on all sides added to the luridness of the scene. On the German side also were fires innumerable---one or two villages burning tragically with rose-coloured flame.

The Battalion was to be in Brigade Reserve for the initial part of the Offensive; its assembly trench being the New Subsidiary Line some 300 yards behind La Plus Douve Farm and McBride's Mansions, and thence, fifty-five minutes after zero hour, it was to move up to Hanbury Support, an assembly trench occupied at zero hour by 1st Battalion Wellington Regiment. The two days we were at Hill 63 gave the Company Commanders and myself an opportunity. of settling the positions of the Companies in the Assembly Trench and in Hanbury Support, and of reconnoitring the routes between the two points. We therefore knew on the day itself where to go and how to get there. Our chief danger was the enemy Barrage. At Messines, however, the British Counter Battery work was excellent, and when we braced ourselves on the morning of the 7th to dive through a zone of German High Explosive, we were relieved to find it almost insignificant The Air Service, who can never get all the praise they deserve, and whose work is so vitally important, had assisted to locate a very large proportion of the German Batteries, and our preponderance of metal was big enough to enable us to tell off guns whose sole duty was to neutralize their fire. The result was that our Barrage was deadly, and the German Artillery at the crucial moment almost harmless.

While the 1st Brigade was at St. Omer, the other two Brigades had carried on the work of preparation. We saw roads repaired to our front line, and tracks for Artillery and Tanks completed, and the whole sector seemed scarred with new trenches. Nothing surely could live in Messines and its surrounding dug-outs. Every gun behind our lines and every trench mortar in turn rained their missiles on the heaps of bricks and mortar on the top of the Ridge and on the face of the hill. And yet no sign of life could be seen, and our work was undisturbed. It seemed as safe in our trenches as in St. Omer. Rumours now reached us of mines of prodigious strength waiting their moment under La Petite Douve and Ontario Farm, Strong Points in the German lines, and Tanks were in the offing, to everyone's delight. Above all, the weather was wonderful.

The 3rd Battalion N.Z.R.B. relieved us on the 5th, and thus gave us a full twenty-four hours at De Seule to rest and to issue to the men all the paraphernalia of Battle: Rations, Iron Rations, Bombs, Rifle Grenades, Ground Flares, S.O.S. Rockets, Wire-cutters, S.A.A. Sandbags and Emergency Field Dressings. That evening the men had a special supper of coffee, cakes and cigarettes, and the Officers of the Battalion also met in the largest hut in the Camp and toasted the King and the Regiment. At 10.30 p.m. Headquarters and the four Companies marched out; the parade states showing:

*Headquarter*s---Major *W*eston, Captain Goldstein, N.Z.M.C., Lieutenants Treadwell (Adjutant), King (Signalling Officer), Jackson (Intelligence Officer), and 47 other ranks. *Wellington West Coast Company*---Captain McKinnon, Lieutenants Melles, Duncan and Robbie, and 177 other ranks. *Hawke's Bay Company*---Captain R. F. C. Scott, Lieutenants Bollinger, Murrell and Gibbs, and 165 other ranks. *Taranaki Company*---Captain Columb, Lieutenants White, Little and Natusch, and 164 other ranks. *Ruahine Company*---Captain Urquhart, Lieutenants Bolton, Fathers and Taylor, and 173 other ranks. In addition, Lieutenant Pollock and

20 other ranks formed a carrying party under Brigade Organization, and Padre Walls proceeded to Khandahar Advanced Dressing Station for the time being, while his Burial Party remained at the Q.M. Stores awaiting an opportunity to go forward.

Out of W, X, Y and Z routes from the Concentration Areas to the Assembly Trenches, we were allotted X route. The German air maps evidently disclosed the routes, for the enemy guns had our road ranged to a nicety. He knew from the course of events that our advance would be made within a few days, and during the last two or three nights had placed a barrage of gas shells along the tracks. He employed no mustard gas and few lachrymatory shells, and we were able to dispense with the eye-pieces of the respirator, simply using the mouth-tube.

We were in no danger from the explosion of the shells, which burst with little force, but one wonders to this day why we did not sustain more casualties from the shells themselves hitting the columns. They, however, fell first on one side, then on the other, in front and behind, rather than exactly where we were.

The Battalion was in position by the time appointed, and a runner sped away with a message to Brigade Headquarters reporting everything O.K. Battalion Headquarters were in a concrete dug-out just off Plum Duff Sap, and we shared it with a few officers of the 4th Australian Division. They had only just come up from the South, and were to go into action later on in the day; 3.10 a.m. was zero hour, and a few minutes' sleep was possible. At zero hour to the second a muffled roar went up, that seemed to die down, and increase and die down again, and then a shake that rocked the very earth. There was a perceptible interval between the last roar of the exploding mines and the guns opening: they might have been hundreds of thousands of dogs unleashed altogether with a deep-toned bay and bark.

The 2nd Anzac Corps (3rd Australian Division, N.Z. Division and 25th Division) attacked the Ridge, having the 9th Corps on its left. The honour of capturing Messines itself was given to the New Zealand Division, and the 3rd N.Z.R.B. and 2nd N.Z. Infantry Brigade were entrusted with the Blue and Brown Lines (1st and 2nd German Lines on the forward slope) and the Yellow Line (Messines Village), in the following formation:

2nd Brigade (on left).

Brigadier-General W. G. Braithwaite, C.M.G., D.S.O.

1st Otago.	1st Canterbury.
2nd Canterbury. 2nd Otago.	

3rd Brigade (on right).

Brigadier-General H. T. Fulton, C.M.G., D.S.O.

3rd Battalion.	1st Battalion.
2nd Battalion.	4th Battalion.

They met with complete success in spite of strong opposition, and two hours and ten minutes after zero (5.20 a.m.) the 1st Brigade (Brigadier-General C. H. J. Brown, D.S.O.) attacked and captured the Black Line beyond the Village, with 1st Battalion Auckland on the right and 1st Battalion Wellington on the left. The Barrage again moved forward, and one Platoon from 1st Auckland on the right and two Companies from 2nd Auckland on the left moved out and established five strong points along the Black Dotted Line. 2nd Battalion Wellington in the meantime lay in Hanbury Support Trench awaiting orders. We had emerged from the New Subsidiary Line fifty-five minutes after zero, when the dawn was still grey, and in single file by companies made for Hanbury Support by the routes we had reconnoitred beforehand. A few seconds' wait while the Adjutant made sure everyone was there, then up on to the road along which ran Plum Duff Sap, turned to the right down the Artillery track by the River Douve, then to the left and across country on. the parapets of the trenches to our new Headquarters. A heavy smoke fog lay a few feet above the ground, and the unmistakable

odour of lethal gas was everywhere. It was no use attempting to voice orders: the roar of the guns and machineguns overwhelmed all other sounds: one could not even distinguish the explosion of the shells of the enemy's futile barrage that fell near us. The flash and smoke, and dust and débris were seen, but their noises were anonymous contributions to the general din. Our storming troops had not escaped altogether while waiting their turn to advance. In one trench that we passed, lay the bodies of five men killed by a single shell, and close by an abandoned Tank; a little further on, several men of our 1st Battalion had died. I heard afterwards one of them was Lieutenant Fell. Padre Walls chose a spot for a grave that afternoon and buried them.

At one o'clock the 4th Australian Division continued the advance and captured the Green Line (Oostaverne line). Along a three Corps' frontage the same success was obtained. Everything dove-tailed. Due allowance was made for the twists and turns of the trenches, and for the different rates of progress on the various frontages, and the barrages for all the attacking Divisions fitted into each other perfectly. The whole thing was carried out as it was designed, with clock-like precision, and the casualties were few. One gets used to most things but never to the casualties. It is always a shock and a grief to see the lists. If we could only play the game of war for the fun of the thing!

The Pioneers immediately set to work to repair the Wulverghem-Messines Road, and it became once more the main thoroughfare to Messines. A Dressing Station was established on the road near our old front line, and the ambulance cars took the wounded from there. My brother was one of the first to pass through the Dressing Station, having been wounded shortly after his Battalion (1st Canterbury) took its part of the Blue Line. As soon as the enemy realized he had lost the ridge, the guns that he had available opened upon it, but the shelling was not heavy on the 7th. All that afternoon our own guns were moving up into more advanced positions and registering on points the Hun would have to cross in order to attack the Australians. This is why the means of communication from forward troops are so important. To protect them, the guns must know with certainty where they are. The airmen assist by watching our men advance, and ground flares are lighted to show the aerial observers where the foremost positions are. To us the most inspiring sight was the mounted men riding forward. There were not many of them, but they were the heralds of the open warfare of which we dreamed, and of victory. It was the same on the Somme : the news that the cavalry were up and would go through us raised the men's hopes as nothing else did.

Next day we relieved first the 2nd Aucklanders in the Black Dotted Line, and later our own 1st Battalion in the Black Line. 1st Auckland remained in the position it had won, and 2nd Auckland and 1st Wellington relieved troops of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades further back around the Village, and those two Brigades were then withdrawn.

I made my headquarters in a concrete Pill Box called the Blauwen Molen, east of the village. It had been a German Artillery Headquarters with an elaborate telephone exchange, and close by were some underground dug-outs absolutely full of German dead. The Blauwen Molen was one of the 1st Battalion's objectives, and fell to the Wellington West Coast Company. There was an excellent view from it, and we were in close touch with the four Companies from right to left---Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Ruahine and Wellington West Coast. Lieutenant King was very successful with his signals, and, besides keeping up communication with advanced Brigade Headquarters on the other slope of the Ridge, ran out telephones to the four companies. We had a quiet morning until about 9.30 a.m., but alter that the Hun Artillery gave us little peace. It was early in the morning that our Brigadier was killed. General Russell had been up to see him at his advanced Headquarters at the Moulin d'Hospice, and was saying good-bye on the road when an H.E. shrapnel burst over their heads, killing General Brown instantly and wounding General Russell's A.D.C. I had been with him in his dug-out a short time before, and discussed the relief while he finished shaving. It is idle to say a soldier on active service has a career before him. He has only a possibility of one. General Brown's record from August, 1914, had been one of unbroken success, and success accompanied by the good wishes of those that served with him. He was a very capable leader and had a rare tact that was bred of understanding and liking his fellows. In more peaceful times he would have been on the threshold only of his career.

That evening the S.O.S. signal went up from the Green Line, and in response to the call our artillery put up a barrage that effectually stopped any attack against the Australians. It sounded as if nothing could live in it. The enemy shelling was fairly intense and crept nearer and nearer to our trenches, anticipating perhaps an accompanying advance of their infantry. We remained in the trenches during the next day, and late at night were relieved by the 14th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 4th Australian Division, and marched back to Bulford Camp

in the Concentration Area. In spite of the shelling, Padre Walls with his burial party carried on most of the day, and we left few of our dead unburied. All of the wounded were got away to the Dressing Station. Shortly after one of the Ruahine Company's Platoons started on the way out, a big shell burst in its midst and killed and wounded several. All that could be done was to dress the wounded, and lift them to a place of comparative safety near by and leave them there. The four Company Stretcher-bearers who were with Company Headquarters did not hear of this until they reached Bulford Camp five miles away, but without hesitation they turned back, faced Hades once more, and carried the wounded out. The Australians had promised to see that these men were looked after, and would have done so directly they themselves had settled down, but the Ruahine stretcher-bearers thought it their duty to get their own mates into safety rather than rest in Bulford Camp.

We lost Captain Scott in the afternoon. Thoroughly tired out, he was asleep in the bottom of his trench, and a shell landed near by. He never regained consciousness, and died before he reached the Casualty Clearing Station.

Our casualties in the Battalion from the 6th to the 9th, both inclusive, were:

	Killed.	Missing.	Wounded.
Officers	2	8	
Other Ranks	13	7	124

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CHAPTER XI

LA BASSE VILLE

THE Artillery spoil a battle as a sport. A wise Commander knows just how long to keep his men under fire, when a few days' rest will restore them to their former high courage. Let them stay beyond the psychological point and their morale sinks so rapidly that it takes a long time to regain it. This depends principally on the moral and mental standard of the troops, and partly on nerves, on their physical fitness, for the strain is tremendously severe on these qualities.

We had just the change we needed after Messines; twenty-four hours in the hutments of Bulford Camp and then seven days of sunshine in comfortable billets at Brune Gaye. The New Zealand Division had handed over the Messines sector to the 4th Australian Division and was now relieving the 3rd Australian Division on the right. On the 18th the men once more shouldered their belongings and the Battalion relieved 1st Battalion, Canterbury Regiment, opposite the village of La Basse Ville, then held by the Germans.

The Sector was a long narrow one, its frontage only totalling about 750 yards. Between us and La Basse Ville on the right ran the Armentières-Warneton Railway, but on the left the Hun had remained on our side of the Line and established himself in a system of hedgerows. He had interlaced them heavily with wire and, thus protected, his machine-gun posts were strong defences. The system of defence adopted by us consisted of three small posts in front, of, approximately, a Platoon each, under an officer, with their supporting troops in an old German trench near the Au Chasseur Cabaret. That hostel on the road from Messines to La Basse Ville had served many a thirsty traveller in its palmy days : when we first saw it, it served only as a mark for the German gunners and its cellar was no longer a safe place even for a machine-gun crew. Behind that was the supporting Company (Taranaki) in the old German front line, and the two Reserve Companies were, one (Hawke's Bay) in Ploegsteert Wood (Bunhill Row), and the other (Ruahine) in the Catacombs in Hill 68. Headquarters were in 4 deep dug-out near the Post Office of St. Ives, another unrecognizable hamlet.

Messines had blooded the Battalion, and the Companies were ripe for the adventures before them. Adventures do not come unsought, and the officers and non-commissioned officers before La Basse Ville showed a spirit of daring and enterprise worthy of their British Ancestors. The relief was completed by 12.25 a.m., and next morning Lieutenant Simmonds, the Battalion Intelligence Officer, and his Corporal, stalked a German machine-gun on the railway near the village. The Corporal shot one of the crew, but the remainder got the gun into action and the two had to dive for cover. The Corporal worked his way down the overgrown hedges on each side of the Line. Lieutenant Simmonds was obliged to crouch in an adjacent shell-hole until dark, when he ran the gauntlet of their fire and got safely away.

On the left Sergeant Fisher and Private Goddard, from No. 3 Post, while on daylight Patrol, surprised another Machine Gun Post in a hedgerow and shot two gunners, but were not quick enough to prevent the others manning the gun. Although Goddard managed to escape, the Sergeant was wounded and taken prisoner, One of the German prisoners taken by us a few nights later gave the information that Fisher was in their hands, and alive, and some weeks after word came through Geneva of his being a prisoner of war.

Earlier in the morning Lieutenant A. G. Melles, with a Patrol from No. 1 Post, had explored part of La Basse Ville unmolested.

The work in the Posts was very trying on the men. They were merely narrow trenches with no drainage to get rid of the water that accumulated, and sanitation was difficult. In the daytime much movement was inadvisable. Hot rations were brought up at night, but altogether it was not comfortable living. We were thankful that the Artillery on both sides was slackening its efforts. Many of our guns were being withdrawn to other parts of the Front, and the enemy was only too anxious to agree to a reduction of armaments. Our Army Intelligence said a Prussian Reserve Division was opposite to us.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham returned to the Battalion on the night of the 19th, and on the 20th Wellington West Coast Company was relieved in the Posts by Taranaki Company, and went into Support in the old German Front Line.

On the night of the 21st-22nd June the Battalion attempted an operation in conjunction with 1st Auckland on the North, the object being to clear the ground of enemy posts on the right to the River Lys, and on the left to the main street of Warneton. Three Platoons were the forces engaged, Nos. 1 and 3 Platoons from Wellington West Coast Company being our contribution. As sometimes happens with night operations, No. 1 Platoon and the Auckland Platoon went astray. Two of No. 1 Platoon sections were separated from the column as it moved in the darkness to its assembly point, and by the time they found it again, zero time had passed, and the Enemy Barrage coming down prevented them taking any part in the show. The Auckland Platoon also lost its way, and it was left to Lieutenant Melles and No. 3 Platoon to carry out their job by themselves.

The main and only street of La Basse Ville runs parallel to and between the railway line and the River Lys. Melles divided his four sections into two parties, and with one crossed the railway at a spot near the Messines Road, which strikes the main street at right angles, at the southern end of the village. The Sugar Refinery, at that time merely a skeleton of twisted girders and, broken iron, was situated on the River Lys side of the junction of the Messines Road and the main street. He led his men into the street at this point and fought his way northwards along it. Bomb, bayonet and rifle were used: the fighting was really hand to hand. We learned afterwards from prisoners that there was a considerable German garrison in the cellars of the buildings of La Basse Ville, and most of them, no doubt, struggled out in the darkness to meet the daring enemy right in their midst. It was a great fight, bringing back to memory the way in which our bluejackets in days gone by boarded an enemy ship and swept her decks with pistol and cutlass. The explosion of the bombs, the British Mills bomb being distinguished by its metallic ping, could not drown the grunts of the sweating, fighting men, the groans of the wounded and the screams of those in their death agony. Our men were outnumbered but they were indomitable. They cleared the street, and drove the Huns out of the end of the village to behind a tall hedge that ran at right angles down to the river. Here Melles was joined by his other two sections, which had crossed the railway line higher up, and had struck the Tissage (a large Spinning Factory) at the top end of the Village. As they found it impossible to enter the factory from its northern side, they worked around to its southern side, and after killing a few Germans there, joined Lieutenant Melles, who was then bombing the enemy behind the hedge. He very wisely chose this opportunity to withdraw his party. His casualties were severe, and no good purpose would have been served by staying longer, as he could neither see nor hear any signs of the Platoon that was supposed to be working on his left. He accordingly got

his party together, and with their wounded moved down the street. There they again met some of the enemy, who probably had come up from the cellars in the meantime; of these, our men killed some, and took two prisoners. No further opposition was encountered, and the Platoon withdrew across the railway line. It was found necessary to shoot the two prisoners, who objected to going with their captors, and attempted to escape. Our casualties were, one killed, one wounded and missing, and 16 wounded out of a total of 42. The missing man was so severely wounded that he could not be moved, and fell into the hands of the enemy. I was very glad to meet him in Walton-on-Thames Hospital in April, 1918. One of his legs had been amputated in a German Hospital, and he was afterwards repatriated. For his daring leadership, Lieutenant Melles was decorated with a bar to the M.C. (the first in the Division); he had won his M.C. at Messines. His senior non-commissioned officer, Corporal J. D. Fraser, and Private Ernest Henderson were given the M.M. And well they deserved their rewards. It was my share of the night's work to be in the Power Buzzer Dug-out near the Au Chasseur Cabaret, and it did me good to hear the account of the fighting from Melles and his men when they reported there on the way back to the Support Trenches. One has a very sincere admiration for the man who, in spite of long-distance weapons, is still able to tackle his opponent hand to hand as they did in the days of old.

In view of the failure on the left, a similar operation was undertaken the following night, again in conjunction with 1st Auckland. On this occasion it was confined to clearing the ground between our posts and the railway, the troops on the right having only to patrol towards La Basse Ville. Our Artillery Barrage was very effective, and under its protection three Platoons from Taranaki Company, under Lieutenants A. T. White, C. T. Natusch and N. F. Little, did the work. The garrisons of several enemy posts were destroyed, and identifications obtained. After the operation was completed the three Platoons withdrew. In the meantime, Ruahine Company had come up from the Catacombs to occupy our Front Posts, and the Taranaki leaders, after reporting to Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham in the Power Buzzer Dug-out, took their men back to the Catacombs. Lieutenant Little received the M.C. for the work he did. I always disliked night attacks ; failure is so easy, and a mistake made is very hard, generally impossible, to remedy, owing to the darkness. Success can only be attained by the most careful preparation, and a preliminary knowledge of the ground is essential. It is very much as if one asked a number of blind men to carry out a military operation.

The following night the Battalion was relieved by 1st Wellington, and retired to bivouacs and dug-outs on the slopes of Hill 63. Before Messines the German guns seemed unable to range on the southern side of the Hill and, troops being comparatively safe, as many as four Battalions with details used to bivouac there. After Messines, the losses began to be heavy among the men living in such a small area, and it was not long before the Divisional Commander reduced the numbers.

Our first two nights were absolutely uncomfortable. For the last two weeks the Hun had been using his new mustard gas. Headquarters dug-out, this time, was another rustic shack with a veranda and a charming view towards Armentières, but little protection even against an Army biscuit. We sat bravely there for a time, amongst a mixture of High Explosive and Gas Shells, weeping copious tears even in our respirators. Eventually, however, we sought shelter in an armoured dug-out, a few feet below us, that belonged to the officers of a Wireless detachment operating on the Hill. It was very stuffy, and crowded with officers with streaming and inflamed eyes. We could not bear that for long, and returning to the shack fell asleep in our respirators, to wake up to a glorious morning and the guns silent, for gunners also must sleep.

In June the wood on Hill 63 was wearing a thick, green cloak, so different from its chilly nakedness of April. It seemed sacrilege that shells should tear its beautiful limbs to pieces. To us it brought a feeling of sadness, but what angry bitterness must have welled up in the heart of the owner of the château ! The Lodge was there, but I really do not know where were the remains of the château itself. Revenge to us is an unfelt passion. We feel we are fighting for our very existence, but a savage, relentless desire to destroy the invader and his kith and kin, and everything that he treasures, can abide in the heart only of the Belgian and Frenchman, when they see their homes laid waste by war.

On the third morning our Pioneer Battalion moved away from the ill-conditioned place, and we took Red Lodge, which they had made their Headquarters. Work, work was the motto of the Division, and directly we set foot in the new sector an ambitious programme was drawn up. A deep, duckwalked Communication Trench to the Front Line, and new Shelter Trenches formed part of it, and now that we were in Support our Battalion fell to digging. In an underground war, such as this has been, to dig and dig is the soldier's lot. No wonder the Australians' name for a private soldier is "digger." However, our spell of work was short, as the

4th Australian Division came over from the Messines sector to relieve us and we moved once more out to billets.

Before we went, I took charge of the representatives of the 1st Brigade at the Parade of the 2nd Anzac Corps before H.R.H .the Duke of Connaught. The Duke is Honorary Colonel of the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade. It was held in the square of Bailleul and was a compliment to the Corps for the capture of Messines. Many of the trophies of the victory were parked before the Town Hall, and the troops lined the four sides of the ancient square. Unhappy Flanders : the thought must have struck many of us that it was not the first time the citizens of Bailleul. had watched from their high windows the troops of other races parading in the square. General Plumer was there, as the Corps formed part of the Second Army, but he seemed to wish General Godley, the Corps Commander, to be the chief figure before His Royal Highness, and contented himself with pottering about the parade ground looking at the men and the trophies.

Again our paths lay in pleasant places. St. Marie Capelle is a pretty village at the foot of the pinnacle on which the town of Cassel is built. Across a valley was the wooded Mont des Racollets, and further Eastward the Mont des Cats, with its summit crowned by an ancient Monastery. What a wonderful view there is from Cassel; at night, they say, can be seen the opposing trench lines marked by the gun flashes, but by day there was no sign of strife, and Peace and Plenty seemed to reign. We lay at St. Marie Capelle from 29th June to the 18th July. The training was based on open warfare principles. Only the morning was taken up, and in the afternoon recreational games were played by the men. The officers were thus able to work in some Regimental Tours, and the non-commissioned officers of each Company had their own schools.

In such glorious weather our responsibilities seemed to rest upon us lightly. The allowance of leave to England and Paris was liberal at the time, and with each officer going and returning one's place on the list moved up. We held Battalion sports in preparation for the Divisional Gymkhana, and later had a Platoon Tournament, to which we invited the Mayor and all the Villagers and gave them coffee and cakes. The Mayor circulated our invitation by putting up a notice in the church porch, and the whole village seemed to make a gala day of it. The events at the Tournament were open to Platoon entries only, such as Platoon Relay Race, and Platoon Cock-fighting, which engendered great rivalry and, we hoped, cultivated the Platoon spirit. At the Divisional Gymkhana the Wellington West Coast Company's Tug-of-War Team pulled into the Final, and were then only beaten by a very heavy Maori combination from the Pioneer Battalion : a good performance for a Company team. The Mont des Racollets provided us with an excellent Miniature Rifle Range, and the Battalion shooting went up with a run: a Rifle Meeting helped matters along. We also instituted a Battalion School for young non-commissioned officers. The idea was that it should be a permanent part of the Battalion and instruction should not be interrupted. Whenever the Battalion moved, it should move as a distinct unit, and remain behind the Line when trenches were held. The demand for good non-commissioned officers is so great that a continuous supply of reinforcements within the Battalion is necessary.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham had assumed temporary command of the Brigade on the 4th July, when Brigadier-General Melville went on fourteen days' leave to England, and upon the latter's return his own leave became due. General Melville was a New Zealand Staff Corps Officer, although originally in the Regular Army. At the outbreak of war he happened to be in England on a Course, and saw service in Flanders with his own Regiment in the first phase of the war. He rejoined the New Zealanders in Gallipoli, and was successively Brigade Major to the 2nd and 3rd Brigades, and Lieutenant- Colonel in command of the 4th Battalion of the latter before he was promoted to the 1st Brigade.

Shortly before the Battalion moved back to the La Basse Ville Sector, Hawke's Bay Company (Captain W. H. McLean) was sent ahead to Kortepyp Camp to train for a special operation that entailed the capture of the Village, and when we relieved parts of the 51st and 52nd Battalions, 4th Australian Division, on the 19th July, that Company remained at the Camp.

The Battalion stormed and captured La Basse Ville on two occasions. On the 27th July Hawke's Bay Company had little difficulty in taking the Village, but the Germans, a few hours afterwards, counter-attacked in comparatively great strength, and drove out the posts left by us as a garrison. On the 31st July Wellington West Coast Company, with two Platoons of Taranaki Company, again seized the place, and this time all the attackers remained and held it against the counter-attacks that followed. This operation was made conjointly with Ruahine Company, clearing the hedgerow system on our left between our Posts and the Railway Line.

The week preceding the attack by Hawke's Bay Company was one of busy preparation. The Company trained hard at Kortepyp Camp, and every evening its officers and N.C.O.'s, in turn, came up and patrolled the area between No. 1 Post and the Railway Line, and sometimes across the Line towards the Village. Two Patrols were out on the night of the 21st, and one of them, under Sergeant L. W. Butler, encountered a Run Post on their side of the Railway and had a brush with it. Two nights later an Enemy Patrol came into our country and, hiding in a ruined cottage in front of No. 2 Post, surprised our Patrol on its return journey. In the fight that followed, Second Lieutenant Brookes was wounded and Sergeant Murnane killed. It was understood that we were to tackle the job of clearing the hedgerows on the 28th, and preparations were made for that as well. We afterwards learned, from the prisoners captured on the 27th, that the Garrison numbered about 200, and that, curiously enough, the middle of the Village formed the boundary of two sectors ; a Company from one sector holding the Sugar Refinery, and another Company from an adjoining Sector occupying the buildings at the Northern end. The latter sector included the hedgerows, which were garrisoned by still another Company; the hedgerows formed the front Line in that part of his frontage. So the Germans could not be said to hold the line lightly.

Since Lieutenant Melles' exploit of the 21st June, the enemy had been busily wiring the land between the Railway and the Village. This our patrols and the aerial photographs told us. It was left to Ruahine Company to discover on the night of the 21st July what wiring he had been doing in the hedgerows. We knew there was a machine-gun post behind the hedge, in a corner of the field opposite No. 3 Post, and at midnight a detachment of the first Light Trench Mortar Battery, under Lieutenant Nicol, fired sixty Stokes Bombs into the position, and at ten minutes past twelve the 15th Howitzer Battery N.Z.F.A. placed three salvos at a point about 200 yards behind. The machine-gun was evidently hit by the Stokes, because it was not brought into action by the enemy. The Stokes Gun is able to fire so rapidly that eight bombs are in the air together, and the effect of sixty bombs exploding in a very short space of time can be imagined. Directly Lieutenant Nicol ceased fire, Lieutenant Robbie led forward his fourteen men and struck. the hedge about 150 yards from the corner.

They found it heavily wired, and exchanged bombs with some Germans on the other side ; apparently with some effect, for groans were heard. Here, unhappily, Lieutenant Robbie was mortally wounded by a bullet from a rifle fired through the hedge. Lance-Corporal N. G. Harding, the senior N.C.O. present, led the party along the hedge in a North-Westerly direction towards the corner where the machine-gun was. He could hear an officer or N.C.O. endeavouring to rally the garrison on the other side, but a few more bombs being thrown at them, they made off. Wire was met with all along the hedge. The object of the party had been attained, and Harding, sending a man back to No. 3 Post for a stretcher, withdrew, carrying Lieutenant Robbie with him. The latter, however, died before they reached the post. We buried this gallant officer next day at the Military Cemetery at Prowse Point, 3,000 yards South of Messines, on the Northern edge of Ploegsteert Wood. From No. 3 Post the groans of the wounded and dying Germans were heard until 2 a.m.

The necessity of destroying the wire before the Village and in the hedgerows was plain, and the 15th Battery and the Heavies came to our aid. The former did some very accurate shooting, with careful observation, on the Village side, and the Assaulting Company met with no difficulty there from wire. It was, however, a more troublesome matter to destroy the wire in the hedges by shell-fire, and no great success was attained. The big 6 inch and 9.2 inch guns are two-edged weapons, if such monster engines can be so described. Our troops had to be withdrawn from any posts within 300 yards of their target, for apart from any difficulty the Heavy Gunners met with in hitting the object, the spread of the shell is very wide, especially with the 106 fuse, which increases it immensely.

We thought it necessary, as part of the preparation for the attack, to occupy the Railway Line before the Village, and also to establish a new Post on the Eastern corner of the field in which No. 3 Post was situated. The latter was not done until the second attack on the 31st July, but we placed three more groups of sentries on the Railway. If the Hun had forestalled us there, perhaps his posts would have escaped our Artillery Barrage, and might have caused a cheek to the advance before the men had got into their stride.

For assembly trenches we dug a new Sap along the Messines-La Basse Ville Road, which we had named Cabaret Road, and opened up an old trench (Unnamed Sap) that ran from No. 1 Post to the Railway. We dare not take either of these two trenches as far as the Railway for fear of raising suspicions of a projected attack, and so dug them only half way. Unchained Avenue was a German Communication Trench leading from the Au Chasseur Cabaret to the Railway and passing to the North of No. 1 Post, and this we opened right up to

the Line. No. 1 Post was enlarged to hold another Platoon, and a Communication Trench, which we called La Truie Sap, was dug to provide a shorter route from the Power Buzzer Dug-out to No. 1 Post and to the Village, *via* Cabaret Road or Unchained Avenue. All these saps would serve the further purpose of communication with the Village after its capture, and, indeed, the telephone wire to the place where Company Headquarters was to be situated during the action, was laid down Unchained Avenue two nights before.

Dumps also had to be made. Stokes Bombs were needed in front of No. 2 Post to feed the guns that were to bombard the Estaminet, a two-story detached building at the Northern end of the Village. We suspected the existence of a machine-gun in the second story of the Estaminet, and our suspicions proved correct. A larger general dump was made in the La Truie Farm buildings on the Cabaret Road, containing S.A.A., rations, water, flares, etc., for the use of the future garrison of the Village.

Our preparations were all completed by the night of the 25th, when Hawke's Bay Company came up from Kortepyp and relieved Taranaki Company on the Right of the Front Line, including No. 1 Post. The whole Company thus had twenty-four hours in which to view the approaches to the Village and to study, through the glasses, the portion of it allotted to them in the attack. Unfortunately the Hun put down one of his favourite Artillery Barrages on the Right of the Line next morning, and the Company lost four killed and eleven wounded.

At 1.30 a.m. on the morning of the 27th, Hawke's Bay Company (3 officers and 136 other ranks) was in position waiting for zero hour. Lieutenant Hanna, with No. 7 Platoon, was on the Right in Cabaret Road ready to seize the Sugar Refinery. Sergeant Devery, with No. 8 Platoon, in the Centre in Unnamed Sap to attack the heart of the Village, and Lieutenant Gibbs, with No. 6 Platoon, on the Left, lay in Unchained Avenue, his objective being the Tissage. Captain McLean held No. 5 Platoon in reserve, and made his Headquarters in a trench parallel to the Railway running from Unchained Avenue to the Cabaret Road. At 2 a.m. our barrage came down like a thunderclap, and under its cover the three Platoons stormed the Village. Lieutenant Hanna had but little difficulty in taking the Sugar Refinery, probably owing to the fact that its garrison, so we learned from a prisoner, was concentrated in a large cellar underneath the building. Sergeant Devery cleared the centre part of the hamlet, and met with considerable opposition, that was overcome with severe loss to the enemy, thirty bodies being counted in the street alone, apart from any killed in the buildings. To capture the Tissage, Lieutenant Gibbs had to fight hard, but nothing could stop the men, and they swept the place clear of its defenders, of whom a number were killed by our Lewis Guns, as they fled towards Warneton. Cellars and dug-outs were bombed. Ten bodies lay near the Tissage alone. Four posts of a section each. (forty-four other ranks under Lieutenant Hanna) were left behind, two on the banks of the Lys and two facing towards Warneton, and the remainder of the Company withdrew from the Village as ordered.

So far the affair was a wonderful success, and our losses were insignificant. But, in a very short time, the position was reversed. Fifty minutes after zero the German gunners put down a Box Barrage along the Railway that completely cut off the Village from the rest of the Company, and drove Captain McLean and his reserves out of the position they had taken up. Two small counterattacks were then made from Warneton, which were beaten off by the two Northern posts, to be followed, however, by one in the strength of about 250 rifles from the same direction. No appeal for Artillery help came from the posts by means of the Wry Pistols that they carried, and the Germans, by sheer weight of numbers, overwhelmed them. They attacked and drove back to the Railway the Left of the two Northern posts, and then concentrated on Sergeant Devery's posts, one on the Right of the Northern end, and the other on the River Bank. Some of the attackers climbed on to the roofs of the houses in the High Street and kept up a galling fire on our men, who retaliated as best they could, but the latter's chief efforts were directed to stemming the main tide of attack. These two posts fought to the bitter end, one man, besides Devery, surviving. Lieutenant Hanna made an effort to assist Devery on the Railway side of the Main Street, and only when he saw the posts had gone and the numbers were against him did he withdraw across the Line to face a further advance of No. 1 Post, if such were attempted. Communications went a short time after the Hun barrage came down, and the first news of the events in the Village was brought to Captain McLean by one of Devery's wounded. McLean promptly led two Platoons forward, and a Platoon of Ruahine Company followed him, but by the time he reached the Railway the enemy was in full occupation, and he wisely decided to accept the position and withdraw. Time was given to the enemy to remove his, and also we hoped our, wounded, and the Heavies were then turned on to the ill-fated Village. Our losses were four killed, fourteen missing and thirty-one wounded, and, under the circumstances, can only be regarded as extraordinarily light.

Had it been a raid our success would have been complete, but as it was our intention to hold the Village one must endeavour to arrive at the causes of the failure. My opinion is that the causes were principally three: the first and chief one that the posts left behind to garrison the Village did not put up the S.O.S. signal; the second that all four posts should have been concentrated at the Warneton end of the Village, for it was really only from there that a counter-attack could come, and thirdly that a reserve should have been retained in the Sugar Refinery, where it would not have been so easily separated from the defenders of the Village. However, it is easy to be wise after the event.

At 7 a.m., as I tied my papers together and made down the Communication Trench (Ultimo Avenue) to Battalion Headquarters, I might have been taking up my brief after an exciting case and walking back from the Court-house to my office. And yet what a difference! Half-way down the trench I passed the stretcher-bearers carrying some severely wounded men. They were too weak to talk, poor fellows, but their pinched faces showed what they were suffering. Happily, the ground was dry, and they were spared the slipping and sliding over a muddy track. It is the wounded that should have our sympathy. The dead are gone, and the living are thankful to be still alive. On both attacks on La Basse Ville, the medical arrangements were excellent, and the wounded did not have to wait long before they were removed on stretchers to the tramway that carried them to the Dressing Station behind Hill 63. How the missing fared we should not hear for some weeks. We could only hope the number would include some that were wounded only.

Ruahine Company relieved Hawke's Bay Company in the afternoon, and it withdrew to Kortepyp Camp to bind up its wounds. Next night the rest of the Battalion moved back, its place being taken by the 1st Battalion. While the relief was proceeding, the S.O.S. went up from our front and from the 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment, on our left: our guns started in, I was going to say, "Hell for leather," for at times they sounded behind us like galloping race .horses. The wire went between Battalion Headquarters and Ruahine Company in the Front Line, and until communication was restored one spent an anxious time, as the system of small posts is a standing invitation to a determined enemy to mop one or two of them up in a raid. However, on this occasion he attacked with little determination, and the posts drove him off. One dazed-looking German wandered into the hands of the Aucklanders, and there the matter ended.

I was only given time for a few hours' sleep, a bath and breakfast, before a summons to Brigade Headquarters reached me, and at a conference there, General Melville informed us that as part of a big advance in the Ypres Salient, the Brigade would make another attempt to take and hold La Basse Ville, to capture the hedgerow system as far as the Railway, and, on the left of that, to raid the enemy posts and also advance our line. On the left of the Brigade, the Australians were to carry out some similar operation. First Battalion Auckland would make the raid, 2nd Battalion Auckland establish the new line of posts, and we were to seize the Village and Hedgerows. We should be the extreme right Battalion of the "big push."

The 31st July was the day appointed, and to-day was the 29th. Twenty-four hours clear were ours for preparation. I gave Wellington West Coast Company (Captain McKinnon, M.C.), with two Platoons from Taranaki Company, the job of seizing the Village, and Ruahine Company (Captain Urquhart) (less one Platoon) the Hedgerows, and, at the Brigadier's suggestion, nine volunteers from Hawke's Bay Company, who were through the first attack, were attached to Captain McKinnon to act as guides. There was a good deal to be done and arranged. Unfortunately, our Artillery Barrage just missed the Hedgerows, and with nothing else being done, the German garrison, with their machine guns, would face undisturbed our advance in that quarter. Lieutenant Nicol, however, came to the rescue with his Stokes Mortars. He provided four guns, and we established a dump of 200 shells for him. A Vickers Gun from the 1st Machine Gun Company, and three Lewis Guns from 1st Wellington, would fire into the Germans until the 200 shells had been exhausted. Thereupon, Captain Urquhart's men would advance. Nicol, according to the plan, would then take up his guns and make for La Basse Ville, picking up a party of men waiting for him at La Truie Farm with more bombs, and help in the defence of the Village against counter-attacks. Captain Urquhart sent up his remaining Platoon on the night of the 30th to dig a post in which he could make his Headquarters and keep his Reserve Platoon near the Eastern corner of the field. As can be imagined, this facilitated his task immensely. When his two assaulting Platoons left their Assembly Points, he simply moved forward with his reserve Platoon to a trench dug beforehand, and attached his telephone to a wire already laid. The communications with the Village constituted a difficult problem. The enemy's Box Barrage had repeatedly destroyed the wire on the 27th, and the signallers now reconnoitred a route by way of some disused trenches South of the Sugar Refinery. but that was abandoned and a more direct route taken. Lamps, pigeons, telephone and runners were all to be used. In the action the lamps were a failure, owing to the smoke from

the exploding shells shrouding the light, and the wires, although repaired several times, did not hold. The runner, as often has been the case, was the surest messenger. The pigeons, I think, should have been employed. We used them in the 3rd Battalion at Passchendaele in October with success. The dump at the Truie Farm had been set on fire by the enemy gunners on the 27th, and burned merrily for hours after, so that had to be refilled.

The afternoon of the 30th gave the two Company Commanders time to have a conference with their section leaders and men, and with myself to meet the Brigadier to discuss final details. Zero hour was 8.50 a.m., and the 8 officers and 328 other ranks. apart from Headquarters and medical personnel, marched out of Kortepyp Camp at 11.15 p.m. This allowed three hours for the march, one hour to collect the impedimenta of war at Prowse Point and for unforeseen delays, and half an hour for rest in the assembly positions before zero. Lieutenant Pollock had gone ahead to have the bombs and flares ready for the Companies as they passed through. The cooks went with him, and took up their quarters at Prowse Point. Headquarters moved up earlier, and we had, established ourselves in the Power Buzzer Dug-out, by 10.55 p.m. As we walked up through Ploegsteert Wood and along the slippery duck-walks of St. Ives Avenue and Ultimo Avenue. for it had commenced to rain early in the day, I was glad we had given them ample time to reach their assembly points without anxiety and hurry, and as Treadwell and I sat waiting in the dug-out, we heard the Platoons of the Wellington West Coast and Taranaki Companies moving past to La Truie Sap and Cabaret Road. All were in position by 3 a.m. Captains McKinnon and Urquhart came in to report everything ready, and shortly after they themselves called their runners and left the dug-out.

The Operation was a distinct success, although won at the cost of hard fighting. The casualties out of the 8 officers and 328 other ranks were officers, 1 killed and 4 wounded, and other ranks 36 killed and 93 wounded. As usual, many of the casualties were incurred from Artillery fire after the objectives were gained.

The Ruahine Company had a difficult task. However, Captain Urquhart's scheme of attack was sound, and he displayed great acumen in meeting alterations of plan necessitated by the changing conditions as the battle in his quarter swayed to and fro, and further he was assisted by Wellington West Coast Company on his flank at a critical moment. Lieutenant H. R. Biss, with No. 15 Platoon, was to clear the Railway between the top end of the Village and the point marked 5 K and establish posts. His leading section under Corporal Bargh, while advancing towards the line, met with heavy fire from a machine gun planted in the fence along the Railway, and, suffering severe casualties, was hung up in shellholes. Lieutenant Biss himself went forward, leaving his Sergeant, W. Borlase, to bring on the remainder of the Platoon, and got into touch with Corporal Bargh. It is a costly operation charging a machine gun across the open, and no doubt Lieutenant Biss would have been obliged to stalk it, had riot a few men from Wellington West Coast Company, including, I believe, Corporal Andrew, worked along the Railway. Seeing them, the Germans wavered, and Lieutenant Biss, with all his Platoon, for Sergeant Borlase had come up, rushed the position and captured two guns. Biss was wounded, but carried on until the post was on the way to consolidation, and then went back to the Dressing Station, first reporting to Captain Urquhart and to Battalion Headquarters. In the meantime, on his left, Lance-Corporal S. C. Foot led a party from No. 13 Platoon (2nd Lieutenant C. S. Brown) along the hedge that runs to 5 K, and, in spite of continuous machine-gun fire from the Railway and from his left flank, established a post near its top end. Thus along the Railway we had gained success.

On the other hand, Lieutenant Brown's centre party was almost wiped out in a frontal attack against the hedge where poor Robbie met his death on the 21st July, Brown himself being wounded. His left party made excellent progress, almost reaching the road by an advance along the Northern Hedge, but they too were reduced to three from the rifle and machine-gun fire of the Huns lurking behind their wire. However, the enemy's flank had been turned from the Railway, and soon Sergeant Foot noticed they were beginning to trickle back towards Warneton. He immediately sent the best shot he had (Private Stumbles) right round to their Northern flank, and both he and Stumbles kept up a rapid fire. Several Germans dropped, and the remainder, totalling twenty-four, held up their hands. Four of them were sent to carry out a wounded Auckland officer, and the remainder escorted to Battalion Headquarters. Before they departed, Sergeant Foot extracted the information that they were part of a Prussian Company garrisoning the Hedgerows, with Company Headquarters at a concrete dug-out near 5 K. They had only taken over the line an hour or two before our attack commenced. Foot then pushed on to 5 K and established a post there in a commanding position. In the concrete dug-out he found the Prussian Company Commander's batman, a mere boy, who volunteered the information that that officer had hastily retreated directly our barrage opened.

Meanwhile, Captain McKinnon's men had taken the Village with a rush, half an hour's work with bomb, rifle and bayonet being sufficient to clear it. This time, the more difficult fighting was encountered in the shell-holes between the Railway and the top end of the Village, in the buildings there, and in the hedges and ditches nearer the river. Many Germans were killed in these defences, and those that broke and fled were shot as they ran along the river bank or in the open towards Warneton.

Among the decorations bestowed on the Battalion for the 31st July was the V.C. given to Corporal J. Andrew, of the Wellington West Coast Company. He led a section to capture the machine gun in the Estaminet, and, afterwards, with some more men he attached to himself to replace the casualties he had incurred, went as far as the outskirts of Warneton by way of the Railway and captured another gun there. It was his party that assisted Lieutenant Biss to rush the machine-gun post on the Railway.

The Brigadier relieved the Battalion on the night of the 31st, and until then it faced the Hun Artillery and his counter-attacks on the Village. Our own artillery and machine-gun protective barrage was most effective, and the few Germans that escaped it fell to our rifles and Lewis guns. Captain McKinnon, after capturing the Village, placed three platoons along its Northern edge, one platoon between the centre of the Village and the river, and the remaining two on the west of the main street. Lieutenant Nicol, with his indefatigable trenchmortar men and two guns, were also on that side. McKinnon made his own headquarters near the Sugar Refinery. Comparatively, Urquhart lost more men in taking his objective---less in holding it : McKinnon less in his attack---more in hanging on.

La Basse Ville, during the day, was subjected to an exceptionally severe bombardment : from outside it looked as if not one of its defenders could live through it. All McKinnon's officers were killed or wounded, and that brave fellow Nicol promptly volunteered to hand over his guns to his sergeant and take charge of the front line. McKinnon very gladly accepted the offer, and it was only a short time after Nicol assumed command that one of the German counterattacks developed. A party, estimated at about fifty, collected under cover of the river bank, and made towards our right flank. Nicol at the moment was near the centre of the line, and, taking a few men with him, hurried down to the spot. His party grew to ten as he went, and with a shout they fell on the Boche with the bayonet. A report made by Nicol at the time gave the number bayoneted as twenty, and most of the remainder were wiped out by our fire as they made off. Two other counter-attacks that he launched died under our barrage, put down in response to the S.O.S. call.

It was steadily raining now, and probably troops have never handed over their responsibilities more cheerfully than we did that night. Pollock had provided a piping hot meal for the men at Prowse Point, which they had on their way out, and warm blankets and a comfortable camp awaited them at Kortepyp. Happily again, Captain Goldstein was able to evacuate all the wounded before he withdrew from his improvised dressing station not far from Au Chasseur Cabaret.

For their share in the action Captain McKinnon was given a bar to his M.C., and Captains Urquhart and Goldstein and Lieutenant Nicol the M.C., and I have been told that my D.S.O. and Mention in Dispatches were connected with it. But we were all delighted because so many noncommissioned officers and privates received decorations. One must not belittle the organization and direction emanating from senior officers, but one's sincerest admiration goes to the man who does the actual fighting. He, after all, is the foundation of the whole show. Unless the non-commissioned officers and men are made of the right stuff and have the courage and resolution of giants, all the planning in the world will not win a battle. Unfortunately, often the best deeds have no historian, and their heroes go unwritten. La Basse Ville was unique because it afforded so many opportunities for acts of individual daring and leadership, and because such acts were recorded and thus could be recognized. The decorations given were liberal in number, but every one was earned ten times over.

The next day General Russell called the two company commanders and myself to General Melville's Headquarters, and personally congratulated them on their work, which, if I may say so too, was undoubtedly of the highest order. At the same time the General informed me that he had recommended me for the command of the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment, which had become vacant early in June, upon Lieutenant-Colonel Fletcher being severely wounded. This unexpected promotion again brought regret and pleasure with it, for in four months one had become very attached to the 2nd Battalion. I had met with much kindness and support from all ranks from the Commanding Officer downwards. A few days later General Godley also had the battalion paraded and added his congratulations. I was very sorry I was not present, but in the meantime

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham had returned, and I went on leave to England. And, to my mind, fourteen days' leave was worth much honour and glory.

Chapter Twelve

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